

House Speaker Steven Tilley

2012 Opening Day Address

Friends, family and colleagues, welcome to back to the Missouri House of Representatives.

As I've glanced into the very near future and see my life outside of this building (and man will that be nice), I've also been thinking a lot about those Missourians who do not think of what goes on in this building - the person who is not partisan or ideological and who doesn't spend their time reading blogs or spreading political gossip.

What does that person desire out of their state government? I think there are four things.

- First, they believe government should stay out of their wallet and live within its means just as they must do in their own lives.
- Second, they believe state government should respect and protect Missouri values.
- Third, they believe state government ought to work to create an environment in which our economy can flourish.
- And finally, Missourians believe that all children deserve a world-class education, regardless of gender, geography, income, or race.

Today, I am going to lay out a plan called the blueprint for Missouri that I believe will accomplish these goals. In this year's legislative session, we will stay out of the taxpayers wallet and force state government to live within its means. We will pass a taxpayer protection amendment to give Missourians the opportunity to end the boom-or-bust budget cycle by placing strict limits on the growth of government.

And I stand here today to renew our pledge to pass yet another balanced budget...a budget balanced by making the tough decisions the voters sent us here to make, not by raising taxes on hardworking Missourians.

Unlike Washington, we won't balance our budget by borrowing from the taxpayer. and unlike our Governor, we will not balance our budget by asking our state colleges and universities for a bailout.

We will respect and defend the values of Missouri voters by passing legislation protecting pharmacist's right of conscience not to prescribe abortion drugs; creating a stable funding source for Missouri veteran's homes, and ensuring Missouri law protects our children from predators.

In this economy, Missourians expect us to get to work, to help get them back to work. To do that, we must work to create an economic climate where businesses believe they can not only keep their doors open, but can grow, and hire. This session, we will work to give employers the stability they need by taking a comprehensive look at the laws effecting Missouri businesses and work to provide them with the relief they need. We will work to protect Missouri employers from frivolous law suits from being filed against them by instituting a 'loser pays' legal system, where those who file junk lawsuits against our job creators and lose, are forced to pay the bill.

And we will focus on education to improve the prospects of long-term growth. For too many years we've done nothing to help Missouri children in failing school districts. As your Speaker, I make this pledge to the thousands of Missouri children currently in failing schools: You are not forgotten and we will fight each and every day here in the

Missouri House to give you the kind of quality education every child deserves.

If I ended right now it would probably go down as the shortest opening day speech in Missouri history.

In seven – now eight years – of service in this body, I've never heard a fellow member say that the Speaker's opening day speech was too short. Every year the Speaker trudges up here and uses flowery language to recite a laundry list of legislative priorities. Having been freed from the shackles of seeking future elected office, that's not the speech you're going to hear today. Instead, I want to talk about life and those special moments that make it so amazing.

As I enter my last session in the general assembly, and personally go through a difficult time in my life, I have had time to reflect back on my achievements and the memorable moments. The interesting thing is that it's not the legislative or political victories that bring a smile to my face, it's the personal moments with past and present members that touched my heart or taught me something that I will take with me long after I'm gone. I want to share a few of those with you today.

It's no secret in this building or across the state that I get along with members of both parties and have developed some close friendships with many Democrats. One of those friendships is with former state Senator Jeff Smith. Jeff was once a rising star not just in the Democratic party – but in Missouri and perhaps national politics. He was smart, charismatic, and hard working. He had it all – well, except height – Jeff's so short he makes our majority leader look like a giant. Heck, he was even a movie star. But as we all know – Jeff's world came crumbling down – and he ended up doing time in prison for what he would admit were stupid mistakes.

I was one of the few people from the political world who visited Jeff in prison. So I go to visit him, and I'm asking Jeff how it is – and it's rough. Then I ask him who he's seen or talked to, and he tells me, "When I was in the Senate I had 4,000 contacts in my phone. – 4,000 friends, colleagues, constituents. People who I believed cared about me. But since my fall, only about 100 of those people have stayed in contact with me." I told him I was sorry, and his response surprised me. "Don't be sorry," he said. "It's one of the few positives of this whole thing." Before he went to prison, Jeff said he spent 95 percent of his time with the 3,900 people in his contact list that didn't truly care about him. But when he left, he knew he was going to spend 100 percent of his time with the people who truly did care about him and love him.

The reason I share this story is that we are all elected officials -- with important jobs – and with our responsibilities comes a list of people who want our time and attention. Your contact list has undoubtedly grown substantially since you started in this job. But do not lose track of the people who truly care about you for being you. I stand before today with full knowledge that I lost track for a time and it's something I will always regret.

Don't let that happen to you. Focus your time on the people who love you for who you are, not for what title you attain.

Along those same lines, it wasn't long ago that one of our colleagues, Representative Colona, lost his mother to cancer. I remember getting the visitation schedule and thinking I was really busy and wasn't sure if I had time to go. But Mike is someone that I admire and respect and am honored to call my friend, so I made time. At the visitation, I was with Mike and his family and listening to the memorable times they had with their mom, but also

acknowledging the sorrow of no longer having her in their lives.

As I left the visitation, I remember thanking God for still having my mother in my life. And it made me realize that since entering politics that I had not gone to see her nearly as often as I once did – or call as often as I should. In Mike's moment of loss, he taught me something I should have been smart enough to know on my own – and for that Mike, I will always be grateful.

As Speaker, I've also been able to see great moments. It never ceases to amaze me how, as elected officials, we often have the chance to create a memorable moment in someone else's life – but that moment, in turn becomes a memorable moment for us. I've had countless experiences like that – but one in particular stands out.

Last year, I invited a former member of the House from Poplar Bluff to come speak to the Republican caucus. The former member was Mark Richardson – our colleague Todd Richardson's father.

Now I've never been to an entire Democratic caucus meeting – so I'm not sure exactly how they go, but I'm confident they're not too different than ours. Most caucus meetings take place just before we go up to the floor to start the week – so everyone is ready to get the heck-out-the-door before we even start.

But in comes Mark Richardson. I know many folks in our caucus knew little to nothing about him. But I also knew he was regarded by many as one of the best public servants they'd ever met – and that, boy could he ever tell a story. Mark stands in caucus and tells the story of how he was this close to becoming Speaker from the minority party.

Mark spoke for 30 minutes – and as I looked around the room everyone was on the edge of their seat. No one was checking their watch or their phone. No one was going in-and-out of the room. Todd's dad captured our entire caucus for 30 uninterrupted minutes with just his own ability to tell a story. As Mark finished, I glanced over at Todd – and he didn't say anything but you could tell how proud he was of his father.

As we left caucus and proceeded upstairs, I grabbed Todd and his father, and asked if they would join me at the dais. That day I got to witness Mark, a former member of the House who never served in the majority, be introduced by his son who was presiding over the Missouri House of Representatives.

A few weeks later I received a thank you letter from Mark that said, "You gave me one of the greatest moments of my life, and for that I will always be grateful". It's moments like these that make life special, and each of you have the ability to create those moments for people. I would encourage you to try as often as you can because when you reflect back, those moments will be just as special to you as they were to them.

With that, I want to leave you with a word of advice from a dear friend of mine – a person who is controversial on our side of the building. yes, Jason Crowell.

When I first came here seven years ago, Senator Crowell gave me a piece of advice that I've carried with me ever since. He said, "Leave the building a better place than how you found it."

In seven years, I've done my best to foster bi-partisanship – to calm the tone of debate – and to make friendships across the aisle. When I go back to private life, my fondest memories will not be the bills I helped pass or even the fights we won on the floor. Instead, it will be the moments of friendship I shared with both Republicans and Democrats – and both House members and Senate members.

This building wears us down. We come here from January to May, leaving our families behind, and often feel like we're fighting tooth and nail for everything against everyone. We have a tendency to get too caught up in the fights – and forget just how awesome it is to have the opportunity to be here serving the people. And how, despite our differences in opinion, we all share a commitment to public service that brings us together. Now, I'm not suggesting we spend the next four months holding hands. To do so would be to abandon our mission to represent our constituents. But let's always remember that our common commitment to service and doing what is best for our constituents outweighs even our genuine disagreements on policy.

As we go through this session, I ask that you remember the words of Senator Crowell – leave this building better than you found it.

Thank you for your shared service. Let's have a great session. May God bless the United States of America and the great state of Missouri.